

are obviously unrevealing and unrewarding. The baggage of address and closing, location, and type of letter—draft, copy, autograph letter signed—is reduced to a minimum. Material for the notes has been drawn from county records and histories, newspapers, compilations, manuscripts in various repositories, and numerous other sources, but the notes themselves are not cluttered with documentation. Instead, a brief bibliographical comment in the preface suggests the avenues traveled and refers the reader to the comprehensive bibliography in Charles Sellers' biography of Polk. Editors Weaver and Bergeron have done a superb job.

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William Jennings Bryan. Volume III, Political Puritan, 1915-1925.

By Paolo E. Coletta. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969. Pp. ix, 334. Notes, illustrations, essay on sources, index. \$8.25.)

This is the third and concluding volume of Professor Coletta's major biography of William Jennings Bryan. Picking up the narrative after Bryan's dramatic resignation from Woodrow Wilson's cabinet, Coletta examines the Great Commoner's central concerns and major activities during the last decade of his life. The book falls neatly into three equal parts. In the first third Coletta discusses Bryan and World War I: his battle against "preparedness," his efforts to prevent American entrance, and his role as a "mild reservationist" with regard to the Treaty of Versailles. The middle third of the book lacks the unity of the other two sections. In it Coletta handles Bryan's work in the women's suffrage and prohibition movements, his maneuverings at the Democratic conventions of 1920 and 1924, and his thinking about American domestic and foreign policy issues in the early 1920s. The final portion contains the story of Bryan's absorption in the fundamentalist, antievolution crusade which led to his downfall in Dayton, Tennessee.

The Bryan who emerges from this biography defies any easy summarization. Clearly he was a man of limited intellectual capacity. He had little familiarity with the exciting and transforming ideas which were shaping his time, and he was therefore reduced to clinging, almost pitifully, to the simple attitudes he had inherited from his father. Somehow he managed to combine the open tolerance of a Jeffersonian progressivism (with its reliance upon freedom, democracy, and reform) and the closed-minded intolerance of a biblical fundamentalism (with its tendencies toward authority and blind faith and all its fear of new ideas). All the while he commanded the trust and the

unbounded admiration of an impressively large number of his fellow citizens. Coletta's thorough and painstaking work illuminates Bryan considerably; but lurking beneath the narrative is a figure who remains essentially mysterious.

Coletta's treatment of his subject is openly sympathetic. It is his conclusion that Bryan was a man of profound sincerity, unquestionable integrity, and a deep sense of the need for moral commitment in human affairs. Moreover, Coletta makes a strong case for Bryan's contributions to American progressivism even in this final period of his life; after reviewing the long list of Bryan's legislative proposals, it is easy to accept the argument that he was a genuine source for much of the social experimentation of the New Deal. Given Coletta's essential sympathy, it is not surprising that he sometimes seems a little embarrassed by Bryan's religious fanaticism and by the anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, and ignorance which characterized his final struggle against Darwin. While Coletta is quick to rebuke contemporaries who unfairly criticized Bryan's motives, he appears less ready to apply the same standards to those who defended Bryan's less attractive pursuits. As a result the author sometimes resorts to an unfortunate device: the defense of Bryan is made by Coletta himself, but the most perceptive, ringing, and damning denunciations of Bryan are spoken by others who are fairly and usually fully quoted.

The important point, however, is that it is all there. The reader finishes the book with a solid understanding of the arguments which raged around this tireless, enigmatic, and important figure in American life. Coletta has examined an enormous quantity of primary and secondary source material, and his scholarship in this volume is on the same high level as that of the first two.

There seems little reason to doubt that this will long be the standard life of William Jennings Bryan.

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